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Monday, 24 July 2006, 2.30 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Duclos	(France)
Members:	Argentina	Mrs. Loguzzo
	China	Mr. Cheng Lie
	Congo	Mr. Biaboroh-Iboro
	Denmark	Ms. Løj
	Ghana	Mr. Christian
	Greece	Mrs. Telalian
	Japan	Mr. Oshima
	Peru	Ms. Tincopa
	Qatar	Mr. Al-Thani
	Russian Federation	Mr. Rogachev
	Slovakia	Mr. Grexa
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Shultz
	United Republic of Tanzania	Mrs. Taj
	United States of America	Mr. Donovan

Agenda

Children and armed conflict

Letter dated 6 July 2006 from the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2006/494)

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06-44100 (E)

The meeting resumed at 2.40 p.m.

The President (*spoke in French*): I should like to inform the Council that I have just received letters from the representatives of Benin and Israel, in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, the representatives of Benin and Israel took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President (*spoke in French*): I wish to remind all speakers, as I indicated at this morning's meeting, to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I now give the floor to the representative of Uganda.

Mr. Butagira (Uganda): First of all, I take this opportunity to congratulate the French Republic for assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of July and wish the delegation the best in their tenure. I wish to thank the President for organizing this very important meeting and, through him, other members of the Council.

Before proceeding, I am compelled at this juncture to refer to Canada's statement this morning, to the effect that the situation in northern Uganda should be put on the agenda of the Security Council. For reasons best known to themselves, Canada has led a relentless and aggressive campaign to put Uganda on the Council's agenda, as if to do so would produce some magic wonder. What is even more amazing is the fact that Canada has accepted to be part of the joint monitoring committee mechanism that is addressing the alleged concerns of Canada — that is, improving the humanitarian situation in northern Uganda and promoting a lasting solution to the conflict. As I speak, Uganda is engaged in peace talks with the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Juba. As a result, we strongly object to this persistent and uncalled-for campaign by Canada.

On a positive note, Uganda joins the rest of the speakers in welcoming the appointment of the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy. This came at a time when the international community craved someone to breathe fresh air into that Office. For Uganda, her appointment has even more importance and significance, not only because of the conflict that has dragged on with the Lord's Resistance Army, but also because it marks a new beginning of much-needed cooperation between the Ugandan Government and the Office of the Special Representative. She will have all the support and cooperation from my Government, and I wish her the best in her new assignment.

The need to protect and promote the rights of children in armed conflict cannot be overemphasized. Often children constitute the majority of innocent victims of armed conflicts, wherever they may occur. They are the most vulnerable to indiscriminate killing; they get maimed, raped or defiled, and they are recruited as combatants. Still others get displaced and suffer terrible consequences.

The war instigated by the Lord's Resistance Army in northern Uganda over the last 19 years has been a source of concern with regard to the topic under discussion today and to the international community. Over the years, its method of work was characterized by the abduction of children for use in its rebel ranks, summary killings and various forms of sexual and gender-based violence, such as rape and defilement. This morning the representative of the United States referred to those gruesome acts carried out by the LRA.

I am glad to point out that during the last couple of years, particularly since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the Government of the Sudan and the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement, marked progress has been achieved. For now, the threat posed by the LRA in northern Uganda has been drastically reduced, and the Government is now closely collaborating with the international community to devise a mechanism that will deal a decisive blow to it. It is hoped that the Joint Monitoring Committee launched by His Excellency

President Yoweri Museveni on 4 May 2006 to deal with humanitarian and security concerns, among other things, will go a long way towards addressing most of the problems, such as that of children and armed conflict.

The Government has already increased security in the area to avoid abductions and killings and is in the process of establishing a special unit to deal with the remnants of the LRA. While these initiatives are going on, the Government has embraced peace talks with the LRA under the auspices of the Government of southern Sudan in Juba; these talks started last week. It is our hope that the talks will come to fruition, culminating in the demobilization of the LRA combatants and their reintegration into society. The Government takes cognizance of the fact that the majority of these fighters were abducted children, whose reintegration into society is of paramount importance.

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict visited Uganda recently, as was mentioned this morning. During her visit, a four-principle understanding on the way forward on the question of recruitment and use of children in armed conflict was reached, as a basis for strengthening the existing legal and policy frameworks.

The Government of Uganda and UNICEF will agree on an action plan to sensitize various stakeholders about the national laws, international conventions and protocols against the recruitment and use of children; to monitor implementation of the various national laws, international conventions and protocols against the recruitment and use of children in armed forces; and to remove children, if and when found in the armed forces.

While the Special Representative of the Secretary-General acknowledges the existing legal framework and the fact that the Government of Uganda has no policy to recruit and use children, my Government reiterates its commitment to the appropriate disciplinary action against those military officers and officials who knowingly recruit and use children.

With the above understanding, together with the Joint Monitoring Committee, the institutional and legal framework for addressing the most challenging aspects of dealing with the question of children and armed conflict is in place.

Lastly, in November of 2001, Uganda ratified two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. One of them was on the prohibition of the conscription of children into the army and the use of child soldiers below 18 years. This is also reflected in our Constitution, Articles 25 and 34, as well as the Children's Act of 1996.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of San Marino.

Mr. Bodini (San Marino): One year ago, Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) was adopted, providing the mandate for the establishment of a monitoring and reporting mechanism on children in armed conflict. Unfortunately, since then more children around the world have been mentally, physically and sexually abused or even maimed. More have become killer children, or children killed. Those numbers are growing at a catastrophic pace.

San Marino has decided to take the floor on this issue because it believes it is one of the most important issues at stake. Every time that a child is abused or killed, not only does a human life end, but also his or her dreams and his or her contribution to his or her family and society as well. When a child is forced to become a killer for whatever reason — whether religious, political, or ethnic — an even greater crime is committed. That child, who is, in fact, the prey of hatred and violence, will destroy not only his own future, but the growth of our collective well-being.

We have to stop the diabolic and vicious cycle that obliterates the lives of our children. We have to forge moral values and provide hope and future aspirations for a decent life, so that we do not allow the armed conflicts to continue — or to develop in the first place.

We applaud the establishment of the Security Council Working Group chaired by France, and we commend Ambassador de La Sablière for his excellent work. However, we believe that more can be done. We believe the Security Council, the Governments of the affected States, the relevant United Nations agencies and the non-governmental organizations must improve their working methods and more forcefully prevent such abuses. They must bring to justice the criminals who take advantage of those youths.

Article 24, paragraph 1, of the United Nations Charter states that

> "Members confer on the Security Council primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, and agree that in carrying out its duties under this responsibility the Security Council acts on their behalf."

As a Member, I cannot think of a more compelling duty for the Council than to stop armed conflict carried out by child warriors. San Marino, along with, I am sure, the vast majority of Member States, asks the Council to implement effectively and without delay resolution 1612 (2005). What, in fact, is more important for the Security Council than to protect the right of so many children to enjoy happy and fruitful lives?

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Slovenia.

Mr. Kirn (Slovenia): In the interest of time, I will deliver a shortened version of my statement; the full text will be distributed.

It is my honour to speak on behalf of the Human Security Network, namely Austria, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Greece, Ireland, Jordan, Mali, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland, Thailand and Slovenia, and South Africa as an observer.

Let me begin by thanking the presidency of the Security Council this month for organizing this important and timely open debate. I would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, for her briefing this morning, and for the submission of the first report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2006/389). I also thank Ms. Ann Veneman, the Executive Director of UNICEF, for UNICEF's engagement in providing special protection for children who are affected by armed conflicts.

The Human Security Network supports the implementation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism, as defined in resolution 1612 (2005), with its specific focus on children in disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and rehabilitation processes. We also encourage follow-up reporting, particularly on demobilized children.

The creation of the Security Council Working Group reflects the international community's commitment to address the issue at the highest level. We fully support the Working Group's efforts to address country-specific cases and to respond with concrete recommendations for action. That includes applying targeted and graduated measures and mandating peacekeeping missions, as appropriate. We acknowledge and appreciate the commitment of the Working Group to examine information on progress made in ending the recruitment and deployment of children in armed conflicts, and other violations against them, and appeal for a maximum of transparency in their work.

The Security Council's role in addressing the plight of children affected by armed conflict is an integral part of its peace and security responsibilities. In that regard, the Network further encourages the Council to take up the issue when considering resolutions on specific conflict situations or when planning Security Council field missions. A positive development over recent years is the deployment, on a case-by-case basis, of child protection advisers into certain United Nations peacekeeping operations. These United Nations country teams should be working with national and local authorities to develop time-bound action plans as mandated in resolution 1612 (2005). The action plans will allow the Working Group to review progress in specific conflicts and to use them as a basis to recommend further action.

Atrocities committed against children in armed conflict pose a profound challenge to international law. Massive and gross violations of the rights and dignity of the child continue unabated. Impunity for war crimes and crimes against humanity, specifically against children, must end. Effective prosecution of perpetrators must be ensured by taking measures at the national level and by enhancing international cooperation. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court recognized that conscripting or enlisting children under the age of 15 years into armed forces or armed non-State groups, using them to participate actively in hostilities, as well as sexual violence as a method of warfare, are crimes against humanity and war crimes. The Network reiterates the importance of the International Criminal Court in prosecuting such crimes and bringing an end to impunity.

Respect for relevant international and regional norms and standards on human rights and humanitarian law is a prerequisite for the effective protection of children affected by armed conflict. We urge all States

that have not yet done so to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the International Labour Organization Convention on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour and other relevant international legal instruments, and to further confirm their commitment by effectively implementing those instruments.

We attach great importance to the active involvement and the contribution of regional and subregional organizations in preventing and suppressing violations and abuses committed against children in situations of armed conflict. We fully support all endeavours of the Office of the Special Representative, UNICEF, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, other entities of the United Nations system and other relevant international and non-governmental organizations in this field. It is also important to strengthen the local structures on the ground and to develop local and national mechanisms for early responses to abuses that can feed into the international response.

Let me conclude by saying that the Human Security Network fully supports the recent focus of the Security Council on implementation of past resolutions and tangible responses, with a view to achieving the goal of ending serious violations and abuses of children's rights in armed conflicts. Furthermore, we encourage ongoing dialogue and cooperation at the local and national levels, with the aim of reducing and eliminating the plight of children in armed conflicts.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Anzola (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Venezuela welcomes the initiative of France to convene this open debate on the question of children and armed conflict, which is an issue of concern to the international community.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela regards the work that the Council could do in this area as complementary to the primary role of the General Assembly in the overall handling of the situation of children in the world and to the mechanisms established pursuant to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela recognizes the work done by the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the issue now before us. At the same time, we commend the work done by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. As regards the working group established by the Security Council, we believe that it is important that it carry out its work in close consultation and cooperation with States, given the primary responsibility that States bear in advancing and defending the rights of children. Moreover, it is vital in negotiations and peace agreements among parties involved in situations of armed conflict that the problem of child soldiers is taken into account and given priority in programmes of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration after the conflict.

Our country is a party to the international Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 38 of that Convention enshrines the protection of children during and after situations of armed conflict and establishes a ban on recruitment by all States parties of those under 15 into their armed forces. Venezuela ratified this Convention on 7 September 2000. The Venezuelan State is also a party to the Optional Protocol of the Convention on the Rights of the Child concerning the involvement of children in armed conflict, ratified on 23 September 2003.

We would like to take this opportunity to voice some concerns with respect to that Optional Protocol. The Protocol stipulates that States parties shall ensure that on their territories there shall be no forceable recruitment of minors under 18, furthermore establishing that States parties that allow voluntary recruitment into their armed forces of those under 18 should take steps to safeguard them and to ensure that recruitment does not occur by force or coercion, and that also they will take all necessary measures to ensure that no member of their armed forces under 18 directly participates in hostilities.

There is some ambiguity in some provisions of that legal instrument, which is also plain in article 4, paragraphs 1 and 2, which indicate that armed groups that are distinct from the armed forces of a State should not in any circumstance recruit or use in hostilities those under 18, and that States parties should take all feasible measures to prevent such recruitment and use, including the adoption of the necessary legal measures to prohibit and criminalize such practices.

That may seem contradictory, given that it prohibits recruitment of minors to armed groups distinct from the armed forces of a State, whereas States are allowed to recruit those under 18. Moreover, it is difficult to ensure that irregular armed groups respect the legal measures that have been established against recruiting those under 18 when those groups are contravening all legal norms.

On this point, moreover, our country has concerns about the laws whereby those minors might be brought to trial should they decide to desert when they are in active service in the armed forces with the consent of the parents or those who have legal guardianship over them. What law applies to them? Are the provisions of the Convention and its Optional Protocol applicable to them? That aspect is not dealt with in the Convention or in the Optional Protocol and has not been considered adequately in order to cover situations falling within a legal vacuum, which have been arising recently.

In Venezuela, the Conscription and Military Enlistment Law sets the minimum age for enlistment in the armed forces and participation in armed conflicts at 18. Moreover, in drawing up its Act on the Protection of Children and Adolescents, promulgated in 2000, Venezuela prepared its National Strategic Plan for the Protection of Children and Adolescents, which, among other things, covers the right of survival, and within that the right to protection in the cases of armed conflict.

The National Council for the Protection of Children and Adolescents is the Venezuelan agency that can support the activities of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. It can also establish a collaborative relationship that might provide guidance to the Security Council Working Group and link its work to development-related issues, in particular health and education, in order to give children better prospects of rehabilitation, physical and psychological recovery and reintegration into society.

We would like to stress that the quest for proper solutions to the problem of children and armed conflict necessary involves tackling the causes that contribute to the rise of this phenomenon in various regions of the world. This approach involves applying strategies designed to overcome poverty and hunger as essential prerequisites for ensuring the full realization of the human rights of children. We cannot hide the fact that, given the tragic situation of poverty and exclusion that many children face, they are the first affected when confronting an extremely delicate situation, exposed to all kinds of risks that endanger their integral development.

It is also important to recall that General Assembly resolution S-27/2, adopted in 2002 at the Assembly's twenty-seventh special session, on children, stresses in section III, the Plan of Action, that chronic poverty remains the single biggest obstacle to meeting the needs and protecting and promoting the rights of children. This concern has been tackled by the Government of President Hugo Chávez Frías as a fundamental element in social programmes promoted by the State.

Our country rejects any use of children in armed conflicts, as well as other abuses and violations committed against children in situations of armed conflict. Venezuela deplores the impunity that still prevails in many areas affected by armed conflict where the parties involved continue to contravene the relevant provisions of applicable international law concerning the rights and protection of children in such situations. Venezuela resolutely supports the adoption of effective measures to ensure demobilization of child soldiers and their rehabilitation, physical and psychological recovery and reintegration into society.

Lastly, Venezuela cannot fail to express its deep concern for the situation of boys and girls in Lebanese territory and in the occupied Palestinian territories, given the tragic events that threaten their physical integrity. We call on all the States and international agencies to fulfil their obligation to protect the lives of those who are unjustly swept up in this outbreak of violence in the Middle East.

In recent events in the Middle East, we have seen photos of children being used to support activities of destruction and war. That is no more than a reflection of how the warlords use even the innocence of children who are swept up in traumatic situations around the world.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Guatemala.

Mr. Skinner-Klée (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): To evaluate the situation of children in armed conflict around the world is to assess the future that we are building. The UNICEF report *The State of the*

World's Children 2000 contains a map entitled "Unstable Environments", which indicates that the legacy of the decade of 1990s was more than two million dead children, more than six million seriously injured or permanently maimed, more than a million orphans or children separated from their families, unknown numbers of children psychologically traumatized and more than 15 million children who are refugees or are internally displaced. All of that constitutes an extremely serious reality that needs to be tackled. For this reason, our commitment to the first decade of this millennium is to leave a totally different legacy.

Because we have suffered more than three decades of armed conflict, Guatemala understands very well the importance of protecting and helping children and of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of children in their original communities. We also highlight the importance of establishing monitoring, reporting and verification mechanisms such as, in our case, the United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA). We can say the same of the vital need for securing timely, objective, precise and reliable information to combat the recruitment and use of child soldiers, as well as the need to halt the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons and to strengthen States in order to put an end to such crimes.

Guatemala was visited by the first Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Olara A. Otunnu, in February 2002. He held interviews with various officials of the Government, of civil society, representatives of indigenous peoples and the agencies and funds of the United Nations. He also visited the most devastated conflict areas in the country, which enabled him to draw up a set of recommendations that helped in the adoption of measures in favour of children and helped also to give priority to the issue of the protection of children in the Government's policies, particularly in the areas of education and health.

That experience prompts us to support the continued function of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and therefore we welcome the new Representative, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, whom we thank for her timely briefing this morning. We urge her to continue to visit countries in conflict or emerging from conflict, because we are convinced of the benefits of such a mechanism when it involves the broad-based participation of civil society.

We welcome also the first report of the Secretary-General on a specific situation of armed conflict, which is focused on violations of the rights of the child in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Indeed, Guatemala is a participant in the United Nations peacekeeping mission in that country.

While it is true that the primary responsibility for the maintenance of national peace and security lies with States, it is also a fact that the work of the Security Council, which is closely bound up with armed conflicts and with peacekeeping operations, obliges it also to tackle issues such as the recruitment and abuse of children in armed conflicts.

My delegation concurs with and supports all the resolutions adopted by the Council that are designed to help establish a general framework for the protection of children affected by armed conflict. We would like in particular to draw attention to resolution 1612 (2005), which affirms the primary responsibility of States to put an end to impunity and to bring to justice those responsible for crimes against humanity and war crimes, particularly abuses committed against children in conflict situations. It reiterates also the Council's resolve to ensure respect for its resolutions, norms and principles for the protection of children in armed conflict, and also establishes the Council's Working Group on this issue.

For that reason, we commend the French presidency for its report on the work of the Working Group, and we endorse the presidential statement that was issued this morning, which, without a doubt, reflects the magnitude of the problem and the imperative need to put an end to the recruitment of children in armed forces by groups and individuals. It is essential to ensure the reintegration of such children in their original communities, the lasting rehabilitation of demobilized children, and the strengthening of military and civilian justice systems so that States can put an end to impunity for those who have disregarded the resolutions and condemnations issued by the Council concerning such reprehensible practices.

We support the Secretary-General's policy of zero tolerance and welcome the fact that we are in the "era of application", as set out in resolution 1460 (2003), aimed at putting an end to impunity. We regret the delays that have taken place and the fact that the

independent review will probably not be concluded by the end of this month, since those responsible for it have not yet been appointed. However, we do not believe that this review should be postponed until the end of the year; on the contrary, we urge that it be done as soon as possible.

We believe that the appointment of advisers for the protection of minors in peacekeeping operations is an excellent idea. We thanks Ms. Ann Veneman for her report this morning, and we congratulate UNICEF in particular for its work in the field, because their broad global coverage of all issues relating to children gives them a very clear picture of the problems experienced by children in armed conflict. Above all, we urge them to continue to work in close cooperation with States' Governments.

I wish to thank you once again, Mr. President, for this opportunity to express my country's views on this very important issue.

The President (*spoke in French*): The next speaker on my list is the Permanent Observer of Palestine, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): Palestine welcomes this open Security Council ministerial debate on children and armed conflict, and we extend our deep appreciation to the French presidency for having convened such a timely debate. We firmly share the belief that the protection of children in armed conflict is a matter of immense importance. The interest shown by the Council is both appropriate and necessary, and we hope that it will continue to give it priority attention until sufficient and serious protection of children in armed conflict is granted in all cases, without selectivity or inaction based on political considerations.

Before continuing, Palestine would also like to take this opportunity to welcome Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. We congratulate her and wish her success in her task of furthering the cause of protecting children affected by armed conflicts. We are hopeful that her efforts will greatly contribute to ensuring that the plight of children exposed to violations and abuses during armed conflicts will be more vigorously addressed by the international community. In this connection, we would like to thank her for her recent statement, issued on 20 July 2006, calling for the protection of children in the Middle East. We would also like to thank Ms. Ann Veneman, Executive Director of UNICEF, for her attendance and for her participation in this debate. We thank them both for their thought-provoking statements and hope that their ideas and proposals are given careful consideration. We also welcome the presence and participation of the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

For more than 39 years, Israel, the occupying Power, has been committing serious violations and grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention in its policies and practices against the Palestinian people, including Palestinian children. It continues to flagrantly and systematically violate their human rights, in violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The Israeli occupation has permeated every level of their lives, affecting even their most basic rights and gravely impairing and endangering their lives and their very future.

I regret to state that it is very difficult for the Security Council to assert credibility, or claim success, in dealing with the issue of the protection of children in armed conflict when it has repeatedly failed to effectively respond to the protection needs of Palestinian children and other children in our region. Here I refer to the increased need for urgent action in that area during the past several years, and most recently, over the past several weeks, during the latest Israeli aggression against the besieged Gaza Strip and its captive civilian population, including children, many of whom have been killed, injured, maimed, left homeless, left motherless and fatherless, terrorized and traumatized by the occupying forces. The death toll among the Palestinian people — devoid of protection by the international community — has, just in the past few weeks, surpassed 100 people, at least 16 of them children. Even more tragic is the fact that, since September 2000, the number of Palestinian civilians killed by the Israeli occupying forces now totals more than 4,000 Palestinians, including over 800 children.

These staggering figures do not include the thousands of innocent and defenceless children seriously injured by the Israeli occupying forces. Sadly, the lives of Palestinian children under Israeli occupation are under constant threat, for there is no refuge or safe haven, when even their homes,

classrooms, playgrounds and hospitals are not safe from the excessive and indiscriminate assaults carried out by the occupying Power.

In that connection, we continue to call on the international community, especially the Security Council, to fulfil its obligations and to take the necessary measures to ensure the protection of the Palestinian civilian population, including in particular children, in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and not to leave them any longer at the mercy of the brute force and illegal policies and practices of the occupying Power.

Another important issue that must be brought to the attention of the Council is the fact that the deaths of Palestinian children at the hands of Israeli occupying forces are usually given only a cursory investigation, if any. Indictments of members of the Israeli occupying forces for the killing or injury of civilians are rare, and convictions are almost unheard of. That has fostered a culture of impunity among the occupying forces and heightened their perception that they are immune from the law and will not be held accountable for their illegal actions. It is scarcely surprising, then, that Israeli occupying forces act with an air of moral immunity, often shooting excessively, unnecessarily and indiscriminately.

One stark example of the occupying Power's indifference to the right of Palestinian children to life is an Israeli military court's decision of 15 November 2005 to clear an Israeli occupying force commander of a range of charges, including illegally using his weapon after he fired a stream of bullets into the body of an already-injured 13-year old Palestinian schoolgirl in Rafah. At the time of the incident, in October 2004, transcripts of the occupying Power's radio communication exchange revealed that occupying forces in the watchtower had quickly identified Iman Al-Hems — who was dressed in a school uniform issued by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East — as "a girl of about 10 [who was] scared to death". As Iman was running away from the army post, she was shot in the leg and fell to the ground. At that point, the occupying force commander moved in and, standing over the helpless Iman, shot her twice in the head, walked away, turned back and fired a stream of bullets into her body, "confirming the kill", as he termed it.

Indeed, such horrifying actions are a blatant violation of the right to life — the fundamental right of any human being and a right which States parties must expressly recognize under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. But it is not just the right to life that Israel deliberately denies Palestinian children. The policies and practices of the occupying Power violate a countless number of the rights set out in the Convention and other binding international legal instruments, including the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949. Accordingly, it is imperative that measures ultimately be taken to hold the perpetrators of such crimes accountable and to bring them to justice, for without such measures the culture of impunity that we are now witnessing will only grow, with even more disastrous consequences.

I would like to acknowledge that the concept paper regarding this debate suggested that we remain focused on the subject matter and make suggestions. In our opinion, the issue is clear and can be summarized in one word: compliance. That includes compliance with relevant instruments of international humanitarian law and human rights law and compliance with the Security Council's own resolutions. That will ultimately provide the most comprehensive protection for children in armed conflict. We add to that, once again, the need to avoid selectivity, be it with regard to enforcing compliance or in dealing with the matter as a whole.

In conclusion, we believe that the establishment of the reporting and monitoring mechanism, as well as the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, as outlined in resolution 1612 (2005), is a good start in providing the foundation for addressing the issue before us. We invite Ms. Coomaraswamy to visit the occupied Palestinian territory, as we have requested in the past of former Special Representative Olara Otunnu, to examine the absence of protection for Palestinian children under Israeli occupation and to make concrete suggestions on ways to ensure the protection they so desperately need, as is accorded to them under international law. The Security Council Group should also play a leading role in that regard. Serious and urgent efforts must be undertaken to put an end to the dire situation facing Palestinian children. They, like all children of the world, deserve to live in a world in which they can grow, play and learn in freedom, peace and security.

The President (*spoke in French*): I call on the representative of Brazil.

Mr. Tarragô (Brazil) (*spoke in French*): Allow me, first of all, to thank the French presidency of the Council for having convened this meeting on such an important subject.

(*spoke in English*)

I also wish to congratulate Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy on her appointment as Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. Let me also thank her and Ms. Ann Veneman, Executive Director of UNICEF, for their respective statements. I am also grateful to the Secretary-General for submitting his report on children and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We hope that the recommendations of the report will be fully implemented so that the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict in that country can be stopped once and for all.

The problem of children and armed conflict continues to draw attention at a very high level. An effective response to that issue is essential. We are confronted by alarming figures. Nearly 90 per cent of the casualties in armed conflicts are civilians, mainly women and children. In the past decade, an estimated 20 million children worldwide were forced to leave their homes because of conflict. More than 2 million children have died as a direct result of armed clashes. Three hundred thousand children have been used as soldiers in more than 30 countries. The United Nations has a key role to play in changing that sad reality.

In the Middle East, the fate of children has been no less distressing. Even Brazilian children have not been spared the bombardments of Israel on Lebanon. Three of those children living in the country died last week. Such indiscriminate attacks on the civilian population, from all parties, must stop immediately.

The position paper circulated by the presidency of the Security Council on 6 July mentions that important new developments have occurred since the last debate on this matter. Those developments show that we have finished the phase of completing the legal framework required to deal with the issue. We have consolidated the main guidelines in various instruments, such as the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the International Labour Organization's Convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child labour, and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Having entered the era of application, as the Secretary-General indicated in his 2005 report, we are now in the process of designing mechanisms to fully implement the legal framework I have just mentioned. The adoption of resolution 1612 (2005) is the most visible development in that new phase. It establishes a set of concrete measures and the institutional basis for the Security Council to carry out its mandate.

The issue of children and armed conflict constitutes a problem of a complex nature. It requires a comprehensive approach that encompasses social, economic, security and human rights perspectives. Brazil is of the view that an adequate and effective response to this multifaceted problem must comprise coordination of all its elements. It is therefore important to have the involvement of other relevant bodies of the United Nations system.

We expect that the Security Council, based on its Working Group established under resolution 1612 (2005), will work in close coordination with the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. That joint effort is required to address all the aspects of the issue, including the demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers. There should also be coordination with UNICEF, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations Development Programme.

Likewise, we should profit from the contributions that civil society, especially non-governmental organizations, can make to coordination efforts. Such broad and comprehensive coordination is essential to maximize the effect of the Council's actions in stopping the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict.

I should not let pass this opportunity to highlight the importance of the independent review of the implementation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism. At this point, it is not realistic to expect that the evaluation will be completed by 31 July, but it is important that the conclusions of the independent review indicate how effectively the mechanism can link the work of the Security Council to that of other

organs of the United Nations, as well as shed light on the division of responsibilities.

In closing, I wish to reiterate that Brazil is fully committed to the cause of promoting and protecting the rights of the child in general and is determined to support effective measures designed to protect children affected by armed conflict.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Myanmar.

Mr. Swe (Myanmar): I wish to thank you, Sir, for convening this open debate on the important issue of children and armed conflict.

Since the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005), a number of important steps have been taken, including the appointment of a new Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy. I should like to thank her and others for the introductory statements they made this morning.

We have also witnessed the ongoing implementation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism set up to collect and provide timely, objective, accurate and reliable information on the recruitment and use of child soldiers, in violation of applicable international law. We are gratified that resolution 1612 (2005) underlines that the mechanism must operate, inter alia, with the participation and cooperation of national Governments. We take special satisfaction that the resolution also stresses that all actions undertaken by United Nations entities within the framework of the monitoring and reporting mechanism must be designed to support and supplement the protection and rehabilitation roles of national Governments.

My delegation, in previous debates on this issue, has stressed the importance of objective, accurate and verified information with regard to reports that come before the Security Council. We have also stressed that the issue of the protection of children — an issue to which all of us attach special importance — must not be politicized. I have also refuted the unfounded allegations regarding my country from sources originating from exiles and remnant insurgent groups. Those falsehoods were mentioned this morning in the statement made by a member of the Council.

Let me put on record once again that the Myanmar armed forces are an all-volunteer army and that those entering military service do so of their own free will. Under the Myanmar Defence Services Act and the War Office Council instruction of 1974, the minimum age for recruitment into the armed forces is 18 years.

The reports of the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Myanmar have underscored the fact that the insurgent groups in Myanmar extensively practice the recruitment and use of child soldiers. I wish to stress that the Government is taking measures to prevent children from being recruited into the insurgent groups.

With regard to its own recruitment, the Government has taken effective measures to ensure that, even when volunteering, no underage children are recruited into the Myanmar armed forces. To that end, an entity on the prevention of military recruitment of underage children, a high-level inter-ministerial committee headed by the First Secretary of the State Peace and Development Council, was established. Stringent monitoring and inspection are made both at the recruitment stage and again at the training stage. Applicants who fail to meet the minimum age requirement are turned away at the recruitment stage. Additionally, those few that have slipped through the scrutiny and who are found to be under 18 at the training stage are discharged from the military.

The Government, of its own volition, has also drawn up an action plan that includes the protection of children's rights, prevention measures, the promotion of public awareness and coordination with UNICEF. The Government has also arranged visits of the United Nations Development Programme Resident Coordinator and a UNICEF representative to the two main military recruitment centres in Yangon and Mandalay and has enabled them to interact freely with the recruits. The action plan includes provisions for the discharge of children under 18 from military service and their reintegration into families and communities. We have been cooperating with both the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and with UNICEF with regard to the issue and, in December 2005, we again provided the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the Executive Director of UNICEF with a list of newly recruited soldiers who were discharged from military service during that calendar year.

For over 40 years since regaining its independence in 1948, Myanmar suffered the scourge

of insurgency. However, today, as a result of the national reconciliation efforts of the Government, out of 18 major insurgent groups, 17 have come back to the legal fold and are working together with the Government for the development of their respective regions. As a result, we have been able to restore peace and stability to almost all corners of Myanmar. The Government has also extended an olive branch to the remaining groups and will continue to do so. We strongly believe that the best way to protect children in armed conflict lies in conflict prevention and resolution.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the representative of Liberia.

Mr. Minor (Liberia): I bring you greetings, Sir, from our President, Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who was originally invited to be here. Unfortunately, pressing matters of state prevented her from coming, and she has asked me to sit in her stead. As you know, the day after tomorrow we will be celebrating the 159th anniversary of our independence, and our people require the President to be there.

This Council is at the apex of the international community's search for peace and security. Today, as we endeavour to seek peace in one corner of our world, rupture is occurring in another. President Sirleaf and the Liberian people are disturbed by the events in the Middle East and wish to register support for the exercise of restraint on both sides of the divide. In pursuing a resolution to the crisis, we believe efforts must be made to remove or eliminate threats to sovereign States in the region and that the reduction of hostilities and the pursuance of peace should be within the context of the United Nations and this Council.

It is commendable that, in spite of the crises in the Middle East and other burning issues around the world, the Council has found it expedient to schedule a debate on children in armed conflicts. That subject is important to Liberia and to our entire region.

Children constitute almost one half of our entire population and they unjustly suffered during the continuous war we experienced in our country. It is well established that far too many of them were victims of brutal killing, rape, sexual assault, abduction, torture, forced labour, or forced recruitment as fighters in combat. Twenty-one thousand of them are known to have been child soldiers, participating in murder, mayhem, rape and the destruction of property.

Our war has ended, but our country is now involved in the humongous tasks of reconstruction, rehabilitation, reconciliation and renewal. In meeting those challenges, our children are foremost in our minds, our plans and our actions. The Government's education programme, one of the most challenging, is aimed at increasing the percentage of children in school, especially girls; improving the quality and practicality of the skills they acquire; and enhancing the level of literacy and numeracy in the country.

We abhor the violation of the security and rights of our children and vouch to exert every effort in their rehabilitation and support of their security. Having ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Government is now proposing to the national legislature the ratification of the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

As we address the issues affecting children in Liberia, we continue to be disturbed by conflicts in other parts of our subregion. The reported recruitment of Liberian children to cross the border and fight as mercenaries in other countries is most disquieting. While we certainly are doing and will continue to do all we can within our means to curtail that problem, we appeal for United Nations intervention not just in condemning the practice but to bring to justice all persons who flagrantly violate the rights of children by maliciously and illegally recruiting them to kill or be killed and thus destroy and violate the rights of innocent people.

The Liberian Government is aware that although we have been assisted in disarming and demobilizing our combatant children, the transitional safety net provided to them is inadequate. They must be returned to their families and schools and be assisted in developing the requisite skills to be fully rehabilitated and to participate in civil life, gainfully. Continuous support from the Council and from all of our friends in the international community would help greatly in the process.

Liberia remains grateful to the Security Council for its role in helping to resolve the Liberian crisis. The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) has been and continues to be our saving grace. We pray as the Council considers its redeployment that the process will be gradual, thus enabling us to restructure and

train our own security apparatus to ensure that the peace we have won, with the Council's help, is sustained.

The lifting of sanctions on Liberia forest products is an important step in assisting our Government to meet the challenges we face to improve the lives of our children. In that context, we ask for continued support to meet the conditionalities for the lifting of sanctions on our diamonds.

I congratulate the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and commit our full support to the work she does. I also wish to thank UNICEF and all those who have been helpful in our programme to rehabilitate our children. I thank the Secretary-General for his recent visit to Liberia, and I assure the Council of our abiding faith in the Organization and our commitment to its goals and objectives.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I wish to express to the President the appreciation of my delegation for convening this important meeting. In addition we thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his report on children and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2006/389). My delegation expresses its appreciation to the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, for her tireless efforts to promote and protect the rights of children in armed conflict. I also express our appreciation to Ms. Ann Veneman, the Executive Director of UNICEF, as well as the other speakers in the Council today. I take this opportunity to reiterate Egypt's support for all of their efforts and the efforts of the United Nations and its entities to achieve the objectives.

Since 1999 the Security Council has given special attention to the issue of the protection of human rights during armed conflicts, in particular as that issue concerns refugee and internally displaced children and the children killed in armed conflicts. Since then the Council has convened several open debates and adopted six resolutions, the most recent of which is resolution 1612 (2005) of 26 July 2005. That resolution created the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. The Group is considering, inter alia, the situations in the Sudan, Sri Lanka, Côte d'Ivoire and Burundi, after considering the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo last June and submitting its report.

While we reiterate our support for all the Council's efforts to promote ways and means of protecting children in the above-mentioned armed conflicts, as an expression of our African and our international responsibilities, Egypt is astonished at the Council's exclusion of a group of most unfortunate children, those under foreign occupation and in particular the children in the occupied Palestinian territories. Those children are killed every day due to the oppressive and inhuman acts committed by Israel against them. They are punished for the mere expression, with their faint voices and stones, of their refusal of the occupation of their lands, the imprisonment of their families and the blockade and prevention of access to supplies and humanitarian assistance that is leading to the denial to them of all means of a decent life.

Last Friday, Mr. Nambiar, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General, briefed the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East. Among other things, he correctly stated that the latest military actions by Israel had resulted in the killing of 147 Palestinians thus far, at least 15 of whom were children killed in their houses and villages as the result of a series of attacks. The most recent such incident was the killing of a large number of children who were spending their summer vacation on the beach of Gaza, by bombarding them from the sea.

There is no doubt that the Security Council's neglect of the suffering of the Palestinian children under occupation has encouraged Israel to widen and expand the scope of its military operations to include the children in Lebanon, within the context of its current ongoing military operations.

Under-Secretary-General Jan Egeland stated to the Council last Friday, and reaffirmed during his subsequent visit to Lebanon, the magnitude of the humanitarian tragedy confronting one million Lebanese, due to the disproportionate and arbitrary Israeli military attacks that have resulted in a huge number of children losing their lives or being maimed or disabled. In addition, other Lebanese children are suffering from severe humanitarian crises and tragedies as a result of the military operations and blockade that

have led to the lack of food, water, medicine and other essential needs of life.

I was delighted to see Ms. Coomaraswamy interviewed this morning on an Arab television station, where she reaffirmed her readiness to make all necessary efforts to protect children in Lebanon. I hope that we will soon see practical steps in that regard.

Egypt demands that the Security Council immediately take a decision to broaden the scope of the work of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict to include the children in the occupied Palestinian territories and Lebanon. Egypt requests the Council to take the necessary effective measures to guarantee equality between the Arab children in Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, African children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire and Burundi, who are duly protected by the Council and the United Nations from such inhuman acts.

Egypt requests that all measures be taken at the level of both the Security Council and the General Assembly to prevent Israel from attacking children and to ensure that it respects, as an occupying Power, its legal commitments, as well as to guarantee that a comprehensive and just solution to the Middle East crisis is achieved exclusively through the final status negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations as soon as possible. That would provide the necessary protection for Palestinian, Lebanese and Israeli children alike.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Colombia.

Mrs. Holguín (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank the President for convening this debate on children affected by armed conflicts. We are aware of the importance that France has attached to this issue and, as a country affected by this cruel problem, we are grateful to it. Moreover, we would like to thank the Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for her work and her statement today, and also Ms. Ann Veneman, Executive Director of United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

We commend the Council on the implementation of resolution 1612 (2005), which has begun to yield its first results. Colombia, as an affected country, reaffirms its willingness to cooperate and welcomes the monitoring mechanism when it falls due for countries in annex II, once the exercise concerning countries on the Council's agenda in annex I is completed, accompanied by the independent review stipulated in the resolution.

Circumstances such as the current conflict in the Middle East, where hundreds of children are affected by armed conflict, indicate the need for an even wider approach to the issue. We trust that the Secretary-General's Special Representative will act accordingly. As a complement to the Council's work, we believe that the work of the Office of the Special Representative at this new stage must go beyond formulations of the problem. We believe that it must, working jointly with States and relevant entities within the United Nations system, focus on preventing such situations and finding lasting and specific solutions to each one. In this regard, we would ask the Council to ensure that, in addition to documenting the situation on the ground, monitoring will present strategies for long-term solutions to address the recruiting of minors by terrorists and illegal armed groups.

In studying this set of problems, what is clear is the need to create national strategies for the development and protection of vulnerable children threatened by the actions of illegal armed groups that operate in various countries and regions of the world, strategies to be designed by countries themselves with the support of the United Nations system.

Though the Security Council has studied the issue and alerted us to the urgent need for solutions, these will be found in the short-, medium- and long-term through support for national programmes — or their establishment when they do not exist — that seek to permanently rescue children recruited by illegal armed groups. Likewise, as stated by many Council members this morning, social and education programmes focusing on vulnerable children must be strengthened and must be a priority.

In this context, Colombia has 2,600 children demobilized from illegal armed groups in the last four years. For rehabilitation, we have counted on the support of UNICEF and the International Organization for Migration. The emotional and physical rehabilitation of children affected by armed conflicts is a priority for us, as are prevention programmes. Both tracks lead to the strengthening of education and employment systems that promote an atmosphere of

opportunity for children, both to prevent their recruitment and to foster their social and economic integration into the communities and societies to which they belong.

In this task, we believe the United Nations Development Programme and UNICEF have a key role to play and must consolidate their country programmes and proposals to find lasting and sustainable solutions that will guarantee and protect a harmonious and productive life for these children. In this respect, it is important to study UNICEF's successful experiences as examples for implementation in affected countries.

The challenges of prevention, reinsertion, reintegration and rehabilitation are complex, and there are no simple or single formulas. Solutions must be designed on a case-by-case basis, keeping in mind the particular conditions of the situation. Dialogue and cooperation are, without a doubt, the best tools at the disposal of the United Nations to work in countries where there are children recruited by illegal armed groups.

For prevention and rehabilitation policies to be successful, a great financial effort is required by affected countries, as well as the support of the international community through cooperation and technical assistance, since this situation arises in developing countries with economic and financial limitations.

While we thank the Council for its interest and its monitoring of this issue, we believe that the United Nation's social and economic development system must work together on this matter both within the system and with affected countries to find lasting solutions that benefit children affected by illegal armed groups.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. Bukeni Beck, representative of the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict.

Mr. Bukeni (*spoke in French*): I wish to express my deep appreciation to the Government of France for having organized this debate and inviting to the Council a representative of civil society. In particular, I would like to thank the Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations for its remarkable leadership in chairing the young Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

We are pleased with the appointment of Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy to the post of Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and we thank her for the important work that she has done. We also thank UNICEF for the important work it has done on the ground and pledge our cooperation in an ongoing basis.

My name is Bukeni Beck. I am director of AJEDI-Ka/Project Child Soldiers, which is a Congolese non-governmental organization for the rights of children. We are working in Uvira, in South Kivu. My organization is an active member of the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, whose goal is to protect children and to monitor and report abuses.

I am chagrined to have to report that in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo grave violations of children's rights continue and are even intensifying, particularly in rural areas. The reason for this is simple — there is nothing there to protect them.

The action of the United Nations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has certainly been beneficial, but it remains limited in scope. The response to violations must be strengthened in towns and carried into the villages to put an end to killing, mutilation and torture of children, to recruitment of child soldiers, to attacks against schools and hospitals, to rapes and other sexual violence, and to the spread of HIV/AIDS. Stronger efforts must also be made to ensure access of children to humanitarian resources, including those of psychosocial sustenance.

I find it particularly alarming that we have learned that Bunia rebels in the Ituri region continue to enlist children into their army. "What good are all your reports and tables on abuses suffered by children", I am asked by inhabitants of my village, "if the culprits go unpunished?"

Monitoring and reporting of abuses against children is an essential starting point to ensure their protection. However, that is not the end of our duty. We also need to confront declared violations and put an end to impunity for their perpetrators. Today, thanks to resolution 1612 (2005), the Security Council and the United Nations system as a whole are in a position as never before to prosecute thousands of guilty parties for their crimes against children.

Meanwhile, it is my honour to present a number of recommendations to change the life of children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

First, the Security Council should mobilize the political will that is necessary, after so many years of promises, to arrest the guilty and help the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to establish national tribunals that would arrest and try those who violate children's rights, as well as follow up in support of the work of the International Criminal Court in the country.

Secondly, it is up to the Member States to support the Security Council and the United Nations so that definite measures to improve the protection of children can be implemented.

Donors can ensure the financing of monitoring and reporting mechanisms that not only work for disarmament and demobilization but also help in long-term reintegration, particularly of girl combatants.

The United Nations bodies and agencies must remain committed in equal and transparent partnerships with civil society to carry out monitoring and reporting in the ultimate goal of an appropriate response to declared violations.

The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo must ensure implementation of the sanctions imposed by the Security Council against those responsible for violations of the rights of children.

Finally, the international community has made a great deal of progress in combating the terrible crimes perpetrated against children in armed conflicts throughout the world. The children of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and of other countries expect of us that we put an end to attacks and to the impunity that allows violence to continue. The time has come to act. They can wait no longer.

The President (*spoke in French*): The next speaker on my list is the representative of Benin, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Zinsou (Benin) (*spoke in French*): Allow me at the outset, Mr. President, to tell you how pleased we are to be participating in this open debate of the Security Council, convened by your country as part of your presidency. Please accept my heartfelt congratulations. Last year our two delegations worked very hard together to bring to a successful conclusion the difficult negotiations on resolution 1612 (2005), which established a monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict.

We express our deep appreciation to Ambassador de La Sablière, in his capacity as Chairman of the Working Group on children and armed conflict, as well as to the other members of the Council for the significant progress made in the implementation of the resolution. The mechanism is now operational and is being strengthened thanks to the joint efforts of Council members and of the new Under-Secretary-General and Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy. We commend her for her vigorous efforts, and we would recall also those made by her illustrious predecessor, Mr. Olara Otunnu — a staunch defender of the cause of children in armed conflict. We also welcome the contributions of other agencies of the United Nations family that are actively participating in the implementation of the mechanism.

The international community's combat against the phenomenon of the recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts is now reflected in a wide-ranging mobilization and in increased pressure on the parties concerned so as to induce them to abide by international norms for the protection of children in armed conflict, by motivating them to make concrete efforts to put an end to violations of all aspects of the rights of children.

My delegation is particularly pleased at the creativity shown by the Council in operationalizing the Working Group in a manner that guarantees the mechanism's universality. Benin attaches great importance to this principle.

We are truly pleased to note the spontaneous commitment of a number of countries that are not on the Council's agenda to cooperate voluntarily with the mechanism. We strongly hope that it will be expanded, within the set time frames, to all countries affected by this phenomenon. We call on all countries directly concerned to associate themselves with the efforts being made by the Security Council and the international community in this area.

The work of the Security Council has, fortunately, been supplemented by considerable efforts on the part of international civil society and non-governmental organizations, many of which are working to implement resolution 1612 (2005). Their

operational activities in the countries concerned strengthen the mechanism on the ground by helping to promote the coordination of national monitoring and reporting networks.

Thanks to civil society and to non-governmental organizations, the Security Council can now focus its attention on the most remote villages. The Council must do everything in its power to determine ways and means of helping to resolve the specific problems identified by the mechanism's local and international partnerships.

In that regard, we should focus in a sustained manner on measures that could be taken to give the mechanism's local partnerships the means that they need to ensure the rapid reporting of information on violations and to come to the assistance of the children concerned; to speed up the reaction of the relevant authorities with respect to actions to be taken to put an end to the reported violations and to allow for the prosecution of the perpetrators; and to increase the level of protection of the mechanism's local partnerships so as to shield them from reprisals.

In addition to the steps taken to demobilize child soldiers and to rehabilitate them and reintegrate them into their communities, the question of the violence and sexual exploitation experienced by children and young women merits particular attention. The heinous crimes committed against them should motivate the Council to contemplate coercive measures of deterrence to prevent violations of the rights of children. Increased cooperation with the International Criminal Court would contribute to the credibility of the Council's determination to put an end to impunity in that area.

The Council should also strengthen its action regarding related factors that have an impact on the situation of children and young people in terms of international peace and security. My delegation would like to highlight in particular paragraphs 13 and 16 of resolution 1612 (2005), which targets certain activities such as the illicit movement of small arms, the illicit trade in natural resources and other destabilizing cross-border activities.

The Council should also take into greater account the obvious correlation between the social problems of children and young people and the proliferation of internal armed conflicts, and it should also take steps to find better ways of preventing and resolving them.

However, beyond a sectorial approach — which is, of course, important — the Council's action would be more effective if the United Nations were to develop a comprehensive conflict-prevention strategy, as called for by heads of State and Government meeting at the September 2005 summit.

The President (*spoke in French*): Naturally, we have not forgotten the historic role that Benin played in establishing this process, as Mr. de La Sablière recalled this morning.

The next speaker on my list is the representative of Israel, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Sermoneta (Israel): Mr. President, at the outset, I would like to join my colleagues in expressing my thanks to you for having convened this meeting. I would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Coomaraswamy, for her valuable contribution to today's meeting. Finally, I would like also to thank the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Veneman, for her work and for that of all UNICEF staff in this important area.

Israel ascribes great importance to protecting children during armed conflict and is encouraged by the continued efforts of the Security Council and the Secretary-General to that end. We believe that children in particular should live without fear of physical, psychological, and all other forms of abuse emanating from conflict. It is our responsibility to protect them and to instil in them a reverence for life and respect for all their fellow human beings, under whichever national flag they may live.

Israel is concerned about the ongoing cases of violence against children during times of conflict throughout the world. We appreciate the emphasis in recent reports on protecting children in armed conflict, and we believe that continuing grass-roots efforts, alongside greater government involvement, can alter this disturbing trend.

We note with particular interest the observation of the Council's Working Group that the majority of conflicts today occur within national boundaries. Many of the most infamous civil conflicts of recent decades have been in Africa. But Israel also bears the burden of a neighbouring failed State: the failure of Lebanon to fully extend its sovereignty over the whole of its territory and the growth of an ingrained terrorist infrastructure and ideology that has moved into that

vacuum. We can sympathize with the inhabitants of those areas who are held hostage to an ideology of hate and death, because we too are held hostage to Lebanon's failure.

In the north of Israel children are the victims of wave after wave of rockets and mortars — thousands of them by now — launched indiscriminately by Hizbollah terrorists. May I remind the Council that Israel completely withdrew from that area more than six years ago.

Israel must further note the cynical and dangerous exploitation by the State supporters of the Hizbollah terrorist infrastructure, Syria and Iran. By deliberately embroiling the civilian population of Lebanon in this conflict, they have reduced these innocents to mere pawns in their regional strategy.

In the south of Israel children have also been subjected to an ongoing barrage of Qassam rockets launched from the Gaza Strip, an area administered by the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority. Israel disengaged from that area almost one year ago.

Hundreds of thousands of children in my country have no summer vacation — no time to play in the fields and playgrounds with their friends in what should be a time in their lives free of stress and anxiety. Instead they hear the wail of sirens and know the look of fear on their parents' faces as they scoop them up in their arms and run to bomb shelters. And they are the lucky ones who have not personally experienced the damage and death visited by terrorists' rockets.

Palestinian children are victims of a culture of hate and violence. They are indoctrinated from a tender age by their teachers and by textbooks and learn to denigrate and delegitimize the other. Finally, in the ultimate act of hate, they are brought to the point where they are willing to embrace their own early deaths for the sake of other people's deaths. What more shocking abuse of children could one imagine than to strap bombs around them and send them on suicide missions to kill other innocent civil ·ns — when they have probably not had an opportunity to play football with other children and school mates more than a few times?

Schoolbooks from all over the region, including from Member States that took the floor only minutes ago, similarly call on children to sacrifice themselves. In a typical example, one text instructs schoolchildren that martyrs have nothing to fear and nothing to be sad about. We must put an end to such virulent indoctrination if there is to be any hope for our future generations to live together in peace. This is probably the most extreme example of the opposite of education.

The reality on the ground has created difficult questions for us as a nation, such as how States are effectively to fight terrorist organizations that deliberately endanger both the civilian population they target and those they use as human shields. How can States exercise their legitimate right to take defensive measures against terrorism without causing undue harm to the civilian population? We wrestle daily with the strategic and ethical complexities of this balancing act. It is, we have observed, a debate that has not entered the halls of government of some of our neighbours, especially those of Lebanon, Syria and Iran.

Our foremost obligation as a nation is to protect our civilian population from violence. That is not only an obligation, it is a right recognized by the Charter of the United Nations. Yet we must also take great pains to minimize any harm to other civilian populations, thereby preserving the fundamental values, principles and the democratic rule of law that defines Israel as a nation, which we proudly embrace. We grieve for all civilian casualties on all sides. We hold those who have knowingly and deliberately precipitated this violence fully responsible.

We must emphasize the difference between terrorists that deliberately target innocent civilians — especially children — including the States that sponsor them, and those States that, acting defensively, target these lawless terrorists. Not to make that distinction is to lend equal legitimacy to terrorists who carry out unprovoked terrorist acts and States acting in self-defence. That would run counter to all international precedent and the Charter of the United Nations itself and would serve to encourage terrorists to commit ever greater numbers of terrorist acts.

We have heard today of Israel's alleged indifference to the lives of children in the region. I must say here emphatically that we want nothing more than to ensure the safety of all children, in Israel and throughout the region. The most direct path to that goal is the cessation of terrorist acts emanating from these areas. We have shown time and again that when there

is peace on our borders we have no interest in interfering in the internal matters of our neighbours. On the contrary, the terrorist organizations of Hamas and Hizbollah, the Governments of Syria and Iran and the Palestinian Authority have all shown callous indifference to all children in the region by instigating and perpetuating terrorist acts against Israel.

Finally, we must ask: What of the children who survive these conflicts around the world? Who can gauge how they will grow up? We cannot sit idly by while these vile, callous terrorists and their sponsors and purveyors of death around the world create countless more lost generations. We have finally learned the lesson of the past that implores us to resolutely resist the creeping ideology of hatred and violence that threatens us all. All nations here must recognize the danger posed by this terror to their own States and, ultimately, to their own children, whom they have the most sacred duty to protect. We ask the entire international community to stand with us and against the devastation visited on children by wanton, indiscriminate terrorism and violence.

The President (*spoke in French*): There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the current stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 4.20 p.m.